

TOLPUDDLE

OR

“WHO’S AFRAID”

A DEMOCRATIC EPISODE
IN THREE ACTS

BY

REGINALD SORENSEN

Application for permission to perform this play should be made to the Author, R. SORENSEN, 49, Greenleaf Road, Walthamstow, London, E. 17, England.

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PREFACE

This play is founded on the immortal story of the "Dorchester Martyrs" and the substance of it is historically true. Tawney, the Webbs and other writers on the history of the working class give particulars of this democratic episode. The names of three of the men involved have been employed in the play and certain records of the "rules," the legal speeches and actual incidents, etc., incorporated. On the archway in front of the Methodist Church at Tolpuddle, Dorset, there are the two tablets mentioned in the opening scene and that simple memorial and this play should help us to realise the significance and the romance of the experience of these humble rural labourers.

The play has been performed by The Walthamstow Players to many appreciative audiences, and it is hoped that through this publication it will now reach a larger public. Only a broad interpretation of the Dorsetshire dialect has been given. In addition, however, the following should be noted: the initial "h" and the final "g" are frequently omitted and the final "f" and "s" are often hardened into "v" and "z."

The costume of the period should, of course, be studied. Curtains instead of a door are very effective in Act 2, Scene 2. Toward the end of the final scene, when darkness descends and the transition to modern times is made, either the curtain may be lowered for a few moments (and an explanatory footnote be placed on the programme) or a rapid change of garments may be effected by means of overcoats and scarves. The replacement of advertisements, etc., can be skilfully accomplished in a very short time.

Advice respecting production and particulars of fees, etc., will be furnished on application to the Author,

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December 4th, 1928.

TOLPUDDLE

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“WHO’S AFEARED”

A DEMOCRATIC EPISODE,

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REGINALD SORENSEN.

(On March 17th, 1834, six Dorsetshire Labourers were sentenced to seven years’ transportation because of their Trade Union activity.)

SCENES.

- ACT 1. SCENE 1. *Interior of the Crown Inn, Tolpuddle.
Present day.*
- SCENE 2. *The same in 1834.*
- ACT 2. SCENE 1. *As in previous scene.*
- SCENE 2. *Corridor at Dorchester Assizes.*
- ACT 3. SCENE 1. *The room of an Under-Secretary of State.*
- SCENE 2. *Interior of the Inn.*

CHARACTERS.

TWO LABOURERS, HARRY COURTNEY AND TOURING
PARTY AND LANDLORD.

GEORGE LOVELACE	}	<i>Dorsetshire Labourers.</i>
JAMES LOVELACE		
THOMAS STANFIELD		
JENNIE		<i>A Serving-Maid.</i>
MARGARET		<i>Wife of Thomas.</i>
HARRY COURTNEY		<i>A Tourist.</i>
GAOLER		
UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE.		

TOLPUDDLE

ACT I.

SCENE I.

THE INTERIOR OF A COUNTRY INN.

(A red curtain hangs on the window at the rear and on the wall there are advertisements, a dart board and a "Skittle Club" notice. A fireplace and a door are on one side and a lobby door on the other. Two deep-backed armchairs by the fire, a form at the rear and a chair at either end of the table complete the furnishing.)

(George is refreshing himself as Jim enters.)

Jim. Evening, Jarge. How's the Missus ?

George. Evening, James. Oh, she's not so fine. She doan't have enough real nourishment like. But what can 'ee do on thirty shilling ? Time 'ee've filled the bellies of five youngsters and the two of us, there beant much left for fancy stuff. Us've got to be grateful us beant starving, I suppose.

Jim. That speaker chap t'other night said us could do a lot to better things if us was inside the Union.

Geo. Master says he believes the Union's run to give fat jobs to some of 'em. And I doan't hold wi't either. Agitation beant no good to 'ee in the end.

Jim. No, it beant. Last meeting I went to made me get home too late to please the old 'oman. She rattled on awful. *(Sighing.)* She have got a tongue.

Act 1. Scene 1

Geo. She have, Jim. Now my wife, she doan't talk enough, she doan't. Just sits a-nodding or yawning her head off. Many's the time I've said "I'm wed to a mangel-wurzel." And all she says is "What's the matter wi' 'ee?" And I says, maybe, "Well, beant you got nothing to talk about?" And she says, "Well, what be there to talk about, you fool? Do 'ee want me to get like Jim's wife wi' her everlasting clack?"

Jim. Oh, do she? Well, tell her to mind her own business.

Geo. No offence, James. I was only shewing how queer 'omen is. It's funny, beant it? And there us was once a-courting and a-carrying on with all sorts of fine notions in our heads.

Jim. Ah! And didn't us promise the varmint something then?

Geo. Us did. I says to my missus afore us wed that I was sartin I'd get a job on the railway and rise to be Station-Master or something like that. (*Guffaws cynically*).

Jim. Law! Did 'ee now? Well, I mind telling mine that us'd have a small-holding afore I was forty. But they're just as bad to-day, Jargie. (*With relish*). Why, I heard my boy talking to your Meg last night: "I shall always love 'ee, honest!" says he, "So will 'ee promise?" "How about prospects?" says she. "Prospects," says he, "Why, thee knows what I told 'ee about the bus old Tasker be putting on the road. Well, I be going to have the job of driving it. Twenty-five shillings a week and commission. Can't us manage on that? Course us can." says he. And then he said he'd take her to Darchester to see thicky pictures if only she'd promise.

Geo. And did her?

Jim. Well, her did promise to go to the pictures, anyway.

Geo. Ha, ha! 'Er would do that alright. Danged silly fools, beant 'em? Full o' romance and stuff wi'out thinking of the cost of feeding kids and such things.

Jim. Us were the same, Jarge, afore us were married, but afterwards 'ee can't think of much else *but* kids and the cost of feeding 'em.

Geo. That's what "love" does for 'ee, James. Doan't it let 'ee down?

Jim. That it do. Ah! It be a strange world and nature be a funny thing. (*After a moment's musing.*) Jarge I says life's all wrong and Parson's a danged old fool!

Geo. Here, be careful, James! Be careful wi' your language! It sounds like blasphemy, it do. Anyhow, how can 'ee do anything? 'Us be caught, us be, and it beant any use grousing.

Jim. Well if 'ee be right, then I be right and I says again, Parson be a danged old fool. He thinks he knows all about it, he do, but he doan't, else he'd tell us how things might be changed and made a bit better, but do 'ee? No, he doan't. He sees us a-struggling along and he doan't take no notice 'cept perhaps to say summat about the Lard's will. Why, even speaker-chap at the meeting knew more'n him. He did say we could help ourselves and that we'd got to fetch heaven to earth. It be a danged hard job, though—(*There is a knocking at the door*)—'Ullo! Who be 'ee? Come in! (*The door opens and Harry Courtney and Jennie enter, clothed cumbrously as motorists.*) Here I be going, Jarge. (*Goes out.*)

Act 1. Scene 1

Courtney. Excuse me—What's this place?

Geo. This place, zur? Which place?

Court. Why, this place, fat—ahem!—I mean, what is this place called? Where are we?

Geo. This be Tolpuddle, zur, and this be a pub.

Court. Tolpuddle? H'm. What a name! Well, do you know of a garage round here, or any place where I can get someone to do repairs for me? I've had a breakdown up the road and hanged if I can settle it. So I want a practical man to tickle it up and the sooner the better.

Geo. Beg pard'n?

Court. Oh, damn! I say, will you get someone to help us?

Geo. 'Elp? What 'ee want?

Court. With my motor—repair the jolly thing, you know.

Geo. No, I doan't know. Do 'ee want a motor, be that it?

Court. No. I've *got* a motor, but I want it repaired. It—has—broken—down.

Jean. Yes, something's gone wrong. It won't go and we can't wander about the road all night, so we want a mechanic. You see?

Geo. It be getting late, beant it?

Court. Yes, it is and it will be later still in a minute. Now tell us where there's a motor-shop and we can settle things.

Geo. A motor-shop, do 'ee want? H'm! Do 'ee want to repair it then?

Jean. Hooray! Got it! Yes, splendid. We want someone to repair our motor-car, that *is* it. We've been stuck over an hour by a hedge two miles up the road.

Geo. In a hedge, be 'ee?

Court. No, *by* a hedge.

Geo. Oh! Whereabouts?

Jean. Two—miles—up—the—road.

Geo. Two mile—H'm! Near 'Ooker's Varm?

Court. Oh, yes, I expect so. Something like that.

Geo. Something like that! Then 'ee beant sure, be 'ee?

Court. Oh, lor! It's down there somewhere (*points*) but please hurry up and let us know.

Geo. All right! All right! Doan't 'ee be in a hurry! Now let's see. H'm! A bicycle-shop be——

Court. No, a bicycle-shop won't do. We must get a man who knows something about motors.

Geo. Oh! Then 'ee'd better go to Bere Regis—'bout fower mile from yere.

Court. Four miles!

Act 1. Scene 1

Jean. Oh, Heavens!

Court. I say, that's a bit thick! Surely there's someone round here who knows about motor-cars.

Geo. Well, now I come to think o' it, there be a son here who'll do it.

Court. In here?

Geo. Aye! 'Ere comes the landlord. (*Landlord enters.*) 'Ere, Mr. Barnacle, this here gentleman wants to mend his motor-car. Ur be busted up. (*Chuckles.*)

Landlord. Oh, be ur? Well, we'll see what we can do to ur. My son'll be yere in a minute. What be the matter wi' ur?

Court. Oh, nothing serious, I think. The jolly thing simply stopped dead and although we've coaxed and fiddled about, it's still surly.

Landlord. Well, my son, he'll do it. When 'ee was in army he mended a lorry. Bide here a bit while he sees to it for 'ee.

Court. 'Thanks. There's two more outside.

Landlord. Oh, I'll bring 'em indoors. (*Goes to the door and after a moment re-enters with Tom and Margaret.*) Round to the right, zur, that be it. It be a nice big room away from the bar. Rest here for a bit and I'll fetch my boy. And now, zur, would 'ee like a drop of anything?

Court. Well, how long do you think we are likely to be? Half an hour?

Landlord. Aye, I daresay. But he'll do it as quickly as he can.

Tom. Righto! Then give us something to drink and we'll walk back to the car.

Court. Will we? Thomas, you may walk to Jericho, if you like. I stay here. *You* haven't been poking your nose round oily wheels for an hour. Of course, you gave advice, I know—excellent, useful and detestable advice. Look at me (*shews his hands*).

Margaret. What's the matter with you, dear?

Court. Matter? Look! Matter—greasy matter. Landlord, let me wash myself please, while you bring us—now let's see—mine's a whisky—and yours, Margaret?

Marg. Port, please.

Jean. I'll have some hot milk, please.

Landlord. Beg pard'n?

Jean. I said, "hot milk," please.

Landlord. Er—yes—er—hot milk—er—yes.

Tom. Mine's hot milk, too.

Landlord. Er—er—yes. (*Aside.*) Well, I'll be blowed!

Court. There we are, then. And now I'll get this stuff off and then see your son, Landlord.

Landlord. Very good, zur. Will 'ee come this way, zur?
(*The Landlord leads the way out. The remaining three settle down.*)

Act I. Scene 1

Marg. What a game we've had. I wonder how long it will be before we get back to Bournemouth.

Tom. The Lord knows. We'll have a scrounge round in a minute. Quaint old place, this. Shouldn't think it's been altered much this last hundred years or more.

Jean. (*Turning over an old newspaper.*) Rather interesting, isn't it, to think of the people who've been here? Highwaymen perhaps, and runaway couples. Can't you see them, Tom? All sorts of folk with three-cornered hats and greatcoats.

Tom. See 'em? No, I hope not. Mine's hot milk. Can you?

Jean. (*Shutting her eyes.*) Of course, I can see them creeping back to their old haunts——

Tom. Oo-er!

Jean. Look, there's Dick Turpin and there's Lord Thingymybob with pretty Sally——

Tom. Here, I say Jean, where's your smelling-salts?

Marg. You've no imagination, Tom. Hullo, there's a strike on.

Tom. (*Fatuously.*) Oh! On what?

Marg. Oh, don't be an ass, Tom. Listen! (*Reads.*) "—— The dispute between Messrs. Savory and Co. and their employees is still unsettled. The workers declare that the terms of their piece-work make it impossible for them to obtain a fair wage and after an unsuccessful attempt to secure adjustment by conference, they have withdrawn their labour, pending a new agreement. Messrs. Savory state that they are making other arrangements and that the strike is probably the work of foreign agitators."

Tom. The bounders! Serves them jolly well right if they lose their jobs.

Marg. Rotten bad luck on their wives and children, though.

Jean. Then why don't they stick to their jobs, instead of kicking up a fuss? Beggars can't be choosers, can they?

Marg. But perhaps they really didn't get enough.

Tom. Don't you believe it! Why, think of those outside porters who struck the other day. Little was said about the tips they get. It costs me a small fortune in tips if I ever want luggage shifted.

Marg. It's nice to be able to afford a small fortune, isn't it?

Tom. Ha—ha, Bolshie! That's the stuff to give 'em, eh? My word, Margaret, we must arrange a platform for you in Hyde Park.

Court. (*Entering*). Hullo! Who's a Bolshie?

Tom. Your wife, Harry my boy. Actually trying to defend the blighters who are helping to drag old England to the dogs.

(*The Landlord brings in and distributes the refreshments.*)

Court. Ah, good! Nothing remarkable about this place, is there, Landlord?

Landlord. No, zur, nothing unusual, 'cept perhaps that old Joe hanged hisself in the stables two years 'zactly come Monday. I could shew 'ee the rope he did it with, if 'ee like.

Act 1. Scene 1

Court. No, thanks. Well, here's to a speedy end to our trouble and destruction to all Bolshies.

(The Landlord retires.)

Marg. No, but seriously, perhaps after all they have a case and what are they to do but strike?

Tom. There she is again—Comrade Margaretovitch, first feminine lieutenant of the Red Army.

Court. Red Army! I'd red 'em all right if I had my way. At the rate we're going, these scallywags will be cutting our throats in a month or two and *then* we shall see things. Old Bostock, the shoe-repairer, as manager of the State Bank and the potman here as Admiral of the Crimson Fleet. And the Fishmonger as Superintendant of Fine Arts. What a prospect! The clods on the throne; the mob in power—

Marg. —And the snob in prison, eh, Harry? Well, I'm going up the road to see how things are. A good half an hour's walk. Coming?

Tom. Yes, coming Jean?

Jean. Oh, I'm too tired. I couldn't do a step.

Tom. Well, we sha'n't be long. *(Exit with Margaret.)*

Court. I'm staying—I'm fagged out.

Jean. I say, Harry, you must tell me more about these Labour people. Some of them seem quite decent.

Court. *(Settling himself in the deep-backed armchair.)* Oh, yes, some of them are all right personally, but hare-brained, you know. They're feeding the flames of revolution when they really think they're lighting a beacon of hope. You know—down with slums, no more war, garden cities for all, music for the million—and that sort of thing. Mean well? Oh, yes! But dangerous all the same.

Jean. How?

Court. Well, Jean, they're putting ideas into people's heads that cannot be realised. There always were several classes and there always will be. Most of the population has got to make things so that the rest can enjoy them or else the nation will go under. Look here! You want to enjoy life, don't you? Dances, pretty dresses, books, holidays and so on. Well, how would *you* like to see yourself, say a working-man's wife?

Jean. I shouldn't. Fancy being poked for good—or bad—into one of those little brick boxes for all my life. Ugh! Fish and chips and squalling babies and washing-days and rent-collectors and strong shag. Not for me!

Court. You'd have no choice if you were one of the crowd. Those things would hem you in: it would be your world. However, you aren't, and that's why some of us have got to be careful the rest don't drag us down to their level.

Jean. But isn't it they who want to come up to ours?

Court. H'm! Some of them say so and some don't know and don't care whether it's up or down. They just want to claw us, that's all. It's a dark lookout, Jean.

(There is a slight pause, during which old George enters with his beer-mug, seeking a quiet corner. At a movement of Courtney's he halts.)

Geo. Oh! I be sorry, zur. I thought 'ce'd gone. 'Ee doan't mind me coming in yere?

Jean. Not at all.
(Old George seats himself.)

Act 1. Scene 1

Court. How's things round here?

Geo. Oh, bad, zur, very bad. But there! They've allus been so, I believe. During the war, now, they was a bit better. Pity it ended, I says. We was doing well, and now——!

Jean. Hard times, eh? Ah, well, it might be worse.

Geo. I suppose so, zur. Like I says to Jim not half hour ago: these here unions 'll make things worse if us doan't look out. Agitation doan't do no good, do't?

Court. Quite right. Glad you think so. It's my belief times were better before you had such affairs as Trade Unions. There was more of the give-and-take spirit, eh?

Geo. Well, zur, there allus was plenty of the "take" right enough, *and* a good deal of the "give." One lot of folk "takes" and the other lot "gives." And it beant altered much. Things is much about the same. Give if you have to: take if you can. Only it doan't do much good trying to alter it.

Jean. Is that how you feel—it's no use trying?

Geo. That's about it. What's the good? Why, I 'spects you know they started a Union round here nigh a hunderd years ago. But it didn't last long. No, it beant much good trying to alter things.

Jean. Started a Union here, did they?—a hundred years ago? That was before your time.

Geo. Just a bit; just a bit. Yes, nigh hunderd years ago. You've heard o't (*turning to Harry*) beant 'ee?

Court. No, can't say I have. These things don't interest me much.

Geo. But beant 'ee seen the tablet on the Chapel gate?

Court. No. What's the matter with it?

Geo. Why, zur, there be two marble tablets there, tellin' 'ee that nigh hunderd years ago six men were sentenced to be sent away to Australia because they stood up for their rights. Beant 'ee never heard o't, miss?

Jean. No.

Court. You see, we don't specialise on monuments to departed criminals, my good man.

Geo. Law bless 'ee. These weren't they folk, zur. They was honest God-fearing Methody Chapel men, I've heard, and they tried to get their wages highered and the farmers agreed and then went back on their word and then they formed a Union and then they was arrested—they took an oath they didn't ought to—so I understand—and so they got seven years' transportation. My word, I'm surprised 'ee didn't know. I thought 'ee be full o' larning.

Jean. Come to think of it, I've a faint idea I've heard about it somewhere. So that happened here, did it?

Geo. Aye! I 'spect they met in this very room. Shouldn't be surprised. Law, what a tale they could tell us if they came back.

Court. Sort of spooks, eh? (*Turns his chair to face the fire, with his back to the table.*)

Geo. Summat like that, zur.

(*The stage begins slowly to darken.*)

They had a meeting 'bout it some years ago when they unveiled them stones I told 'ee about and I have a bit of newspaper about it somewhere. I keeps it in my pocket. Shall I read it to 'ee? (*Fetches out news cutting.*)

Act 1. Scene 1

Jean. Oh, yes, do please! Fancy! Methodists were they? What a strange mixture. Religion and agitation.

Geo. Well, miss, begging yer pard'n, miss, 'ee can't fill the soul if the belly's empty, can 'ee? Never mind—listen now. "On Sat'dy last, outside the Methodist Church at Tolpuddle, Dorset, Mr. A. Henderson, M.P., presided over the unveiling of the memorial tablets to the 'Darchester Martyrs' as they are sometimes called. In 1834 these six men were (*darkness*) sentenced to seven years' transportation for having taken an illegal oath. It is fairly sartin, however, that the actual cause of the prosecution was the formation of a Trade Union—a much more challenging proposition then than now. It appears——."

(CURTAIN.)

ACT 1. SCENE 2.

(*There is darkness when the curtain rises. The voices of Thomas Stanfield and James Lovelace are heard.*)

James. Now look here, Thomas Stanfield, I doan't agree wi' 'ee at all, and if we do like to keep together, we can win.

Thomas. Maybe—maybe not.

James. Well, it be the best thing to do. Life beant much worth living on turmuts, though the Lord do provide 'em. But I be sure the Lord doan't hold wi' it. (*The stage lightens.*)

Thomas. No, maybe he doan't, but there be some queer things the Lard overlooks sometimes.

James. Nay, Thomas, that sounds too much like that Willum Cobbett now, y' know. The Lard be mindful of his own.

(Light. The Inn is now set for the period 1834. The advertisements, etc., are gone, the curtains are different and the table is plain. A print or two hang on the walls. Two labourers are seated in smocks behind the table with their mugs. The deep-backed chair, still in place, largely obscures Harry Courtney from view.)

Thomas. All that I be aware of is that we're getting less than keeps a decent hoss—eight shilling a week—it be cruel and I doan't care who I says it to.

James. But our wages be going to be highered now, beant they? The farmers agreed to give us nine shilling, so let bygones be bygones. Times have been bad enough, I know, ever since the French wars, but if they be going to change now, why, let's look forrard and forget the past.

Thomas. Aye! That be all right, but can we trust 'em? I knows what pars'n said when 'ee was preaching last Sunday. 'Ee said we was a-treading on dangerous ground and that us should keep to the station in life the Almighty had called us to and that it was discontent that brought about the revolution in France.

James. Never mind. Us've got their promise and a promise is a promise. I believe it will be all right.

Thomas. Perhaps so, James. I hope so. But if it beant—well I—I—I—I'm not going to stand much more!

Act 1. Scene 2

James. What will 'ee do, then, Tom? Be 'ee going to enlist for a sojer or on a man-o'-war, or be 'ee going to turn highwayman? (*Laughing.*) Fancy our Tom wi' a hoss robbing the coaches or maybe you'll be a smuggler down at Lulworth, eh? (*Enter George Lovelace.*) Hullo, Jarge!

George. I be come to tell 'ee that I met the Squire's son just now and from what 'ee said, I gather there be a funny game on.

James. Oh! What do 'ee mean?

Geo. I doan't know, but I doan't like the look o' things. 'Ee know us got the masters to promise us nine shilling, though we pressed for ten?

Thomas. Ay! And precious little that is, too.

Geo. Anyhow, I doan't believe they be going to carry it out.

James. What be that, Jarge?

Geo. I've heard that old Master Fosket be that wild that he've been drunk fower times in dree days on 'count o't, and he swears he beant going to pay. Says he can't afford it, he do.

James. Oh, do he? But, Jarge, we've got their promise—their solemn pledge, mind!

Geo. Promise! Why, didn't Master promise I the old sow what died last Michaelmas and did I have un? No. Said ur wern't as bad as he thought un and so 'ee pickled ur. And then, didn' he promise I the rabbits in the long field——?

James. But there's Watson. He did give they old chicken. It be no good running 'em all down. There be bad and good farmers, like the rest of us.

Geo. Yes, but what do they say? Times be bad and the land can't afford more than they pay now, though they might like to pay more, they daren't. That be what they says. Well, then, I says, how can old Fosket buy a new gig and hosses to go wi' it? And Wetherby, he've been to dinners at Darchester twice t'other month and home drunk each time. No, that won't do!

James. Ay! They do waste their money—the foolish ones anyhow—but they'd say it beant much compared with what it would cost to pay bigger wages.

Geo. It be my belief it 'ud make a deal of difference if they was a bit careful. Let 'em be just to us first.
(*The Serving-Maid enters.*)

Jennie. Why, Jarge, what be the matter wi' 'ee, looking so sad?

Geo. I'm not sad, Jennie. I be savage—and sour.

Jen. Well sad, savage or sour, Jarge, I doan't like to see 'ee in such a mood.

Geo. P'rhaps, Jennie, 'ee'd be the same if 'ee had to fight like us for justice. It be a terrible struggle to get our dues from the farmers just now.

James. It be like this, Jennie. We be troubled about our talk with the farmers. Th' knows they promised us nine shilling—in front of the pars'n, too—Well, Jarge thinks they won't 'bide by it.

Geo. Yes, and if they doan't—there's going to be trouble, I tell 'ee.

Act 1. Scene 2

Jen. Sh! Jarge. You talk like Captain Swing—I doan't hold wi' it.

James. Ay man! Best be careful. We never know who be about and once they think we be rick-burners, waiting for revenge, there'll soon be trouble and maybe some of us would be put into gaol, though as 'ee knows I've offered myself to help guard the ricks 'gainst danger.

Geo. I doan't hold wi' rick-burning, either, though I can understand it. Yes, I can. Anyhow, something's got to be done, I tell 'ee.

Jen. 'Ee be careful, Jarge. However, p'raps it beant my affair.

Geo. Yes, it be, Jennie, and I will take care. In a way it doan't trouble me much, either.

Jen. Oh?

Geo. No—for I may have a chance afore long to drive the carrier 'twixt yere and Weymouth. How's that, Jennie?

James. Ah, ha! So that be in thy mind, Jarge? Doan' 'ee blush, Jennie.

Jen. I beant blushing, James Lovelace. Why should I? It beant anything to do wi' I!

Geo. Oh, Jennie——!

Jen. Well——?

Geo. Well, Jennie. Didn't 'ee—er——

Jen. No—I didn't. I—I said it depends.

James. Oh—oh! So far as that, be it?

Jen. (*Stamping her feet.*) No, it beant. And it's not far at all now!

Geo. Oh, but Jennie—Jennie! (*Looks very crestfallen.*)

Jen. (*Somewhat relenting.*) Ha—ha! Silly!

James. Come, come, you two. Now Jennie, doan't get so flighty and you, Jarge, quieten down a bit. Doan' 'ee vex yoursel'. Us'll never get things righted this way. Let's think what can be done if the farmers do go back on their word, though the Lard save them and us from it.

Geo. Well, I be going. (*Moves to go, but catches sight of Courtney asleep in the chair. Then, perplexed*) I didn' notice him afore.

James. Nor me.

Jen. He be a stranger.

Geo. Do 'ee think he heard us?

James. Not if he be asleep.

Jen. If he be asleep.

Geo. 'Ee doan't mean——?

James. Nay, he be asleep right enough. Some wandering stranger, tired out, I reckon.

Geo. Then why didn't he speak? (*Impulsively*) He be a spy.

Act 1. Scene 2

James. No, no, George. Doan't 'ee be so foolish.

Jen. (*Shaking him*) Hi—hi—hi! Zur! Wake up! Wake up!
(*The stranger stirs sleepily.*)

Courtney. I—who—who—is it finished?

Geo. Finished—finished what?

Court. (*Sleepily*) The old bus—'s the car all right now?

Jen. Bus—car—what do 'ee mean?

Court. Don't rot, there's a good girl. 's that Tom?

Thomas. Eh? Tom? Do 'ee want me?

Court. (*Struggling to his feet*) I say—er—what—what—what you got on?
(*He is in 1834 attire.*)

Geo. He speaks like a furriner.

Court. Foreigner be hanged. What—what on earth—what y' playing at Tom—Jean? Where's Margaret? She fooling about, too. Where did you get those togs?

Jen. Togs—what be togs?

Court. Go on, play about! Well, you look nice in 'em, I must admit. But where did you get them? (*Laughs awkwardly*) Oh, I see—old times, eh?—Jolly good stunt.

Geo. Look here. Who be 'ee? Be 'ee spying? Be 'ee an informer? 'Cause, if 'ee be (*a sudden gust of anger*) I'll break your—

James. Steady, Jarge, steady! Now, look here, zur.
Where be from and where be 'ee going to?

Court. Look here, old chap—let's call it off. A good joke—
jolly fine—but we must be going now.

Jen. He must have been drinking—but I never served
him. I didn't see him enter even'—'Ee must have
been yere for a long time.

Court. Eh? What's that?

Jen. I say, zur, 'ee must have had a drop too much. Tired
wi' walking, I 'spect and then the liquor as well. 'Ee'll
feel better in a minute.

Court. I swear I had only one whisky. Honest! But I
admit I feel a bit queer. Sort of muzzy, you know.
I'm a bit fogged (*rubs his head dazedly and looks round*)
I say—hm! That's funny, deuced funny.

James. (*Suddenly*) Ah! Look here—have 'ee come from
Lunnon, have 'ee? Be 'ee the visitor from the Grand
National?

Court. The what? Grand National? Let's see, that's
run in February or March, isn't it?

Jen. Poor fellow! He'd better lie down again.

James. Yes, p'rhaps he'd better. But I think I be right.
They promised to send, didn't they?

Thomas. You may be right, James.

Court. (*Looking at his clothes*) Who the—what the blazes!
I say, this is a bit too thick. (*Puts his hands in his
pockets and takes out a letter*) Whose is this? I say,
you know, you're pretty slick. Fancy my not waking
up!

Act 1. Scene 2

James. A letter. For us? (*Takes it out of Courtney's hand*)
Yes. For 'ee, Jarge. (*Hands it over, whilst Courtney re-seats himself in dazed fashion.*)

Geo. Thank 'ee. (*Opens and reads*) Yes, this be Harry Courtney, delegate from the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union. Well, I be sorry I spoke as I did, but I didn' know you be him.

Thomas. What else do it say? 'Ee be too dazed to speak to us properly yet.

James. (*Overlooking George's shoulder*) It be a letter of introduction and to say that he'll give us all the help needed to form a Union here. 'Ee remember 'ee sent to 'em some while ago.

Court. I say, you chaps. What on earth is the game?

James. Look here, Jennie. Can 'ee find him a soft couch for an hour or so?

Geo. That be it! We woke him too soon. We'll talk to him by-and-bye. Show the way, Jennie. (*Takes hold of Courtney's arm*) Tom, help 'un along.

Court. You darned fatheads!

Jen. There, there. You'll be better in a bit.

James. It be a pity he should be like this, but I suppose he've come a fairish way and was dog-tired.

Court. Oh, my aunt!

Jen. This way, zur.

Court. (*After faint resistance*) Oh, very well then. I will have a snooze, for I feel queer. But I say, old man, you do look priceless. So do you, Jean!

Jen. Jean? He means me, surely. How did 'ee know my name. He have a strange tongue, too.

Geo. I doan't hold wi' him calling you Jean. Anyway, let's give him a rest.
(*Exit Courtney, Jennie and George.*)

James. (*Rejoined by George, after a brief pause*) Well, Jarge, what shall us do?

Geo. I say, let's form a Union while the man be here and if it turns out the farmers be going back on their word, why, then we'll be bound together to teach 'em a lesson and we'll strike against working for 'em till they come to their senses again. (*Enter Thomas*) What do 'ee say, Tom?

Thomas. What say?

Geo. I say, let's form a Union and with our united strength us'll win. Dost agree?

Thomas. Well, it needs thinking over, Jarge. It be a risky business.

James. How be that, Tom? There be narry a law against it. The Combination Acts was repealed ten year ago.

Thomas. That may be. But doan' 'ee forget the hundreds of good men hung and imprisoned and goodness knows what during the last thirty year. Doan' 'ee forget they called the yeomanry out at Wareham only a few months since. And how about Peterloo?

Act 1. Scene 2

Geo. Ah, but they wouldn't dare to do such things now. Besides, we be not agen the law. All we want is to stand up for our rights as brothers. We be brothers, beant us? Beant that what we sing about in Chapel? Why, James, thee'st preaching t'other Sunday about how wrong it were to believe in slavery and how 'ee rejoiced that they be going to free all of 'em. But when they let all the blacks free, how about us? Beant us slaves, too? Can us help being slaves on eight shilling a week? Well, I beant going to be a slave any more. I heard Mr. Cobbett say such things need not be if we made up our minds to fight. So I'm for the Union, whatever the farmers decide. They'll please theirselves and we'll please ourselves.

James. Yes, you be right there, Jarge. I'll join, too. If the farmers want to deal fairly and Christ-like wi' us, they can't object to us binding ourselves together in brotherhood.

Geo. And if they do object, then we've got our answer. We'll stop work. That's what we'll do, and no law can stop us.

James. You be right there, too, Jarge. Us'll form a union and I'm sure the Lard will bless our work. 'Ee be willing, beant 'ee, Tom?

Thomas. Y—yes—I think so. But us'll have to be careful.

Geo. We'll get the men round to-morrow and the visitor will explain and we'll elect a committee and go ahead wi' it. There be Tom's brother and James Brigg and Richard Peary—I'm sure he'll join—and there be Elias Riggs and John Wooley.

Thomas. How about John Lock?

Geo. I doan't know about him. Anyway, there be a good score, I know, who'll start.

Jen. (*Returning*) I've put him on the settle in the kitchen. He be fair dazed and says such queer things.

James. He'll be all right. Now Jennie, do 'ee think we could hold a meeting here, p'rhaps two or three—this room'll do nicely.

Jen. I should think so. I'll ask Master, but I be almost sure he'll be willing, though I 'spect it'll cost a shilling. But 'ee beant going to do anything foolish, be 'ee?

James. No, no, Jennie, doan' 'ee worry now. Well, I be going. The missus 'll wonder where I've been. Coming, Tom?

Thomas. Yes—and Jarge?

James. Nay, man. Can't 'ee see he wants to talk business.
(*Guffaws*) Well, we'll see 'ee later, Jarge. (*James goes out with Thomas.*)
(*There is a silence during which Jennie moves about, followed by the questioning eyes of George. At last he speaks.*)

Geo. Jennie!

Jen. Well, Jarge Lovelace?

Geo. Jennie, 'ee do love me, doan't 'ee?

Jen. Doan't be foolish, Jarge. I can't be lovemaking now. I be busy—can't 'ee see?

Geo. But Jennie, before I go, do promise—*do*. Jennie! I know I love 'ee. I allus shall. Honest! So will 'ee marry me?

Act 1. Scene 2

Jen. I—I should like to, George, but—'ee see—

Geo. What, Jennie? Tell me quick. Thee didst say thee lovst me, didn' 'ee?

Jen. Well—I—I think I do, but as father says, "How about prospects?"

Geo. Prospects? Jennie, darling. Thee knowst what I said about the carrier's cart old Notby be putting on the road. He've promised me the job of driving it directly it started. Twelve shilling a week and a bit more for heavy packages. Can't us manage on that? Course us can, and I've nearly thirteen pound saved up and two of them chairs at Jim's be mine and he've promised to buy me a clock and then there be lots of things I can make and——

Jen. Oh, I know, Jarge, but——

Geo. Doan't "but" any more, Jennie. Go on, chance it. And Jennie, I've been promised the cottage that old Mrs. Brown has now—directly she've gone and I doan't reckon she'll last five months. In fact, I've sort of half fixed it up——

Jen. Oh, have 'ee, Jarge? Cheek! I haven't promised 'ee anything yet.

Geo. Er—er—no, but I thought seeing how—Jennie, 'ee knows what I mean. Can't 'ee see us with a little home of our own and p'rhaps after a while me driving my own carrier's cart and maybe if they ever brought them steam engine things down here, like they've got up north, I might get work on one of those and do well.

Jen. Oh, yes. Specially if you get mixed up with this Union, Jarge.

Geo. Well, Jennie, it won't be long afore I leave the land, but meanwhile I can't stand aside from my neighbours, can I?

Jen. You'll be getting into trouble, Jarge.

Geo. No, I beant. But if I be, I can't help it. You wouldn't have me be a coward or a sneak, Jennie, would 'ee now?

Jen. I doan't count, I suppose.

Geo. Yes, yes, 'ee do, Jennie. 'Ee counts a lot. More'n I can tell, but——

Jen. But—but—now it's you "butting." Oh, I see. If 'ee can, thee'll let me bide, but if not, then thee'll drag me in! And thee said thee'd do anything for me and keep me from harm and all that sort of thing.

Geo. Jennie, 'ee won't be dragged in and I would do *anything* for 'ee, honest I would!

Jen. Then doan't go on wi' this Union business. If 'ee fall out wi' the Masters they'll beat 'ee. In any case, doan't have anything to do wi' the Union, but get the carrier's job. There, that'll please me best of all.

Geo. But, Jennie. I can't turn on the men and until the carrier be ready, I must keep on the farm. I can't, I can't help 'em to give way, can I?

Jen. (*Suddenly in tears*) Thee doesn't care for me at all. Thee thinks of any folk before me.

Geo. Oh, Jennie, I doan't. But right's right, beant it, even if it do mean suffering?

Jen. (*Suddenly*) Jarge, it be the Union or me. Which?
(*Cries again.*)

Act 1. Scene 2

Geo. Oh, Jennie—Jennie, doan't 'ee cry now, Jennie. And doan't, please doan't be so unkind, so cruel. Jennie, I love 'ee. Say 'ee'll marry me and us'll face life together—and win. Yes, us shall. Say "yes" now, and us'll go up to Darchester to celebrate it. There be play-actors there and a fair be coming soon. Will 'ee, Jennie?

Jen. (*Between her tears*) All right.

Geo. Oh, Jennie, 'ee will then?

Jen. I'll go and see the actors and the fair anyway. But I must be going now, Jarge. Goodnight! (*Hangs her head tearfully.*)

Geo. And the other, Jennie?
(*The door opens and James enters, followed by Thomas.*)

James. Eh, what be the matter?
(*Jennie runs swiftly from the room.*)
Hullo, Jarge. Weeping so soon, be ur? Eh, well! they be all like that at times. Well, Jarge, we've just heard it be true. The masters beant going to pay the nine shillings and afore long they'll lower it to seven. I've made up my mind. Us'll have a Union. 'Ee be ready, Tom, beant 'ee now?

Thomas. (*Dubiously*) Y—yes—er—yes, yes James—and 'ee, Jarge, 'ee beant backing out?

Geo. N—(*he stops and looks towards the door after Jennie*)
I—I—(*another pause*) NO! I be ready for anything.
Our cause be just.

(CURTAIN.)

ACT 2. SCENE 1.

THE INTERIOR OF THE INN, FEBRUARY 29th, 1834.

(*Jennie is finishing her sweeping. Margaret enters.*)

Margaret. Morning, Jennie! I thought Tom might be here.

Jennie. No, not yet, Margaret. Be anything amiss?

Marg. N—no. At least, I doan't know. The men be meeting here again to-night, beant they?

Jen. They be—and I doan't like it, Margaret. They'll all be locked up afore they're finished.

Marg. Oh, no, they won't. They be only doing what's right. How can us live on the pay men be getting round here?

Jen. It could be worse—and it beant no good jumping from the frying-pan into the fire. They'll all be locked up, I tell 'ee. Dost mind Dick Fortescue and Jim Potter? One of 'em hanged and t'other sent to Botany Bay, and there never was a better man than Jim.

Marg. What about Jarge?

Jen. Oh—Well, I doan't know. But Jarge'll follow Jim Potter, if he doan't look out. Look here, Margaret, where will 'ee be if thy man be taken from 'ee, eh? There be worse things than being a bit hungry now and then. And there be the allowance 'ee can get from the Parish. But if thy man goes, it be into the workhouse altogether.

Act 2. Scene 1

Marg. But Jennie, it beant right, it beant right, that us should have to suffer and I be glad they'll try and do something, though Tom hisself is getting anxious, I agree. But better anything than this scraping and pinching while the farmers get fatter.

Jen. But the farmers—many of 'em—beant doing so well, Margaret. You know Pars'n hisself says that. It's only the big farmers that have a good time.

Marg. I doan't care a stitch what Parson do say. I be Chapel and I doan't see why Pars'n's any better nor anyone else. Anyway, it beant for the likes of him, with his comfortable life to try and excuse things away. Somehow, whether he be right or wrong, it strikes me queer that the Lard should have such people to preach His word. I doan't believe He, Himself, would say or do such things as Pars'n. Didn't he mix with the poor folk like ourselves and cry shame on the rich who be wanting in human charity? No, Jennie. I'll pay more respect to Pars'n when I sees him more understanding of our lot.

Jen. Shame on 'ee, Margaret. I doan't like to hear 'ee speak like some of they wicked Chartists I've heard of. Why, that's how they talked in France and what happened—war and murder and cruelty and—they killed their King!

Marg. Well, that *was* a pity, but we have killed a king, too. There be worse things than killing kings.

Jen. Margaret, 'ee'd best be careful or they may arrest 'ee as well.

Marg. What for, Jennie? I've said no wrong.

Jen. But 'ee spoke against the King.

Marg. No, I beant. I've said there be worse things than killing kings. I doan't hold wi' killing but beant it worse that poor folk should be starved to death than one man be killed—and only all of a sudden, too?

Jen. Well, I never did, Margaret! You be awful! Doan' 'ee say that outside. Anyway, I hope Jarge doan't hold wi' such things or I'll have nothing to do wi' him, so there.

Marg. What do 'ee want him to do then, Jennie? Dost want him to marry and have chillren a-tugging at thy skirts for bread 'ee can't give?

Jen. It's not so bad as that and besides, it'll get better afore long. But if I *did* marry him, it would be if he left the land. He wants to do so hisself. He be going to be a carrier.

Marg. He'll be lucky if he does. But I hope he won't try and get in a factory. They be terrible, I hear, what with the noise and the dirt. But if ever Jarge does become a carrier, what about those who be left? They can't all be carriers.

Jen. Oh, I doan't know and I doan't care! Anyway, I beant going to settle down here. P'rhaps Jarge'll go to London. I want to go to London very much.

Marg. London beant all 'ee think it be, and there be terrible lot o' wicked thieves there, besides merchants and princes and fine ladies and such. Well, I be going to help the men. When we married last year, I said I'd take him for better or worse and I be going to do't. He've put his hand to the plough and mine's there, too.
(*Courtney enters.*)

Jen. Evening, zur! What time do 'ee meet?

Act 2. Scene 1

Court. Seven o'clock! The place is ready, I see. Three or four of us are to meet in committee first, to talk over things. Ah, Mistress Stanfield, how fare you and what brings you here? I'm afraid we can't let you stay to the meeting.

Marg. And why not? Doan't women starve, too?

Court. Er—yes, but this is a man's work, you know. Surely you have enough to do at home and looking after your man.

Marg. We've not long been wed and I still help on the farm at times, but even if I were older and had chillen and much to do, I should think that'll be enough cause for me to join in helping my man.

Court. You're a strange woman, but you talk well enough. Womenfolk as a rule take little interest outside their courting or their baking and sweeping. You're a queer sort of body, aren't you, to be so different?

Marg. We be all queer to somebody and I can't help that. All I knows is, there be wrong in the land and I doan't see why I shouldn't help to put it right.

Jen. (*Breaking in*) I've told her not to be so foolish myself. It be not her place to be mixing wi' such goings on. But there, she do be like that and she won't listen to argument. Nor will Jarge, come to that—(*impulsively*). You're to blame. I wish 'ee'd never darkened this place with they foolish ideas. Ever since 'ee came, there've been nothing but murmurings and meetings and whisperings. Why, there be Jarge last week, three times he said he were too busy with the Union to spare me half an hour and he knows how much I'm against it all.

Court. That's mortal bad, but there, if you're going to marry him soon——

Jen. I can't marry him if he's in prison.

Marg. Doan't be foolish, girl. He won't go to prison. Stick by him and help him through with the Union and then 'ee'll have more money atween you.

Jen. He be going to get more money in a better way than that and I be going to get more money, too. I can't bear having so few garments. I think I be going to service in some gentleman's house for a while. Have 'ee come near one on your travels?

Court. Oh, yes. Why, there's a place going at the Manor House the other side of Dorchester. Hullo! What's that?

(The noise of voices and bumping precedes the entrance of Thomas, James and George, holding up a banner.)

Geo. Let's see! Where shall us put it? How about there?

James. I should say over here was best.

Geo. Then put it up now, ready for the meeting to-night.
(Boisterously they attempt to place it in position.)

Now then, Tom, push up thicky end. *(The pole cracks his head.)*

Thomas. It's a bit awk'ard to handle. Must it be this size?

Geo. Put it up again—woa. *(After much to-do it is at last in position)* There—there—what do 'ee think o' that?
(There is a slightly embarrassing silence as they survey a banner on which is painted a six-foot skeleton and the words "Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers. Remember thine end. Grand Lodge, Tolpuddle.")

Act 2. Scene 1

Marg. Your own work, Jarge?

Geo. Yes—yes—Margaret.

Marg. All of it?

Geo. Oh, yes—well—er—of course, Wetham, the carpenter, did a bit of it.

James. Why, he painted it, Jarge, 'ee know he did.

Geo. Well, yes, he did, to tell 'ee the truth—but it's my idea.

Jen. Then 'ee ought to be ashamed of yourself, Jarge. It beant at all nice.

Thomas. What do it really mean, Jarge?

Geo. Never mind what it means, Thomas Stanfield. It means a lot!

Jen. It means all the children for miles around'll be frightened if they sees it. I think it be horrible.

Geo. (*Somewhat crestfallen*) Oh—but it be supposed to be solemn-like, you know. And I be sure it be like a skellyton because I helped old Joe dig a grave t'other night. The stummick's a bit wrong, but the rest be all right.

Jen. Oh! I think it horrid. Things be getting worse and worse. No wonder 'ee've had no time for me. 'Ee've been spending thy time on that wretched thing. 'Ee be a wicked man.

James. Eh, 'oman! Doan't go on like that.

Jen. (*Angrily*) 'Ee keep quiet, James Lovelace, though he be thy brother. I tell 'ee, you be all mad and I beant going to stand it any more. I've asked 'ee, Jarge, for my sake to leave this trouble and this yere Union and if—if 'ee loved me 'ee would have done so—but—(*weeps*).

Geo. Oh, but Jennie, I do——

Marg. Jennie, doan' 'ee understand?

Jen. (*Angrily bursting into tears again*) No, I doan't understand and I doan't want to, and I doan't want your foolish thoughts, Margaret Stanfield. 'Ee ought to be ashamed of thyself, the way you go on. Well, Jarge, this be the last time. If 'ee love that (*pointing with a shudder to the skeleton*) more'n 'ee loves me (*tearfully but defiantly*) then 'ee can have her—it—him, whatever it be, but 'ee won't have me.

Geo. Jennie—Jennie! I can't go back on the men.

Jen. Jarge—you be mad. Mad and wicked and—(*She turns her back on him to run from the room.*)

Geo. (*Somewhat dazed*) Jennie!—Jennie!—(*He goes to the door*)—Jennie!

Jen. (*From a distance, emphatically*) I doan't want to see 'ee any more. (*A door slams.*)

James. There lad, she's overwrought! Let her be. She'll be better presently.

Geo. But—— (*He closes his jaw with sudden determination.*)

James. Now doan' 'ee take on, Jarge. I tell 'ee 'omen be like that.
(*Exit George.*)

Act 2. Scene 1

Marg. Oh, be they, James?

Thomas. My wife beant like that—that I be sure of.

Court. Well, it's time we began our committee or the others will be kept waiting.

Marg. I want to stay wi' 'ce.

James. Stay to the meeting?

Thomas. Ay! She wants to join us. I've told her it can't be and that it beant in the rules, but her will have her way.

Marg. And why shouldn't I be at the meeting. Beant husbands and wives supposed to share? Well, I want to share this.

James. Well, I never did! But Margaret, 'omen must keep out of these affairs.

Court. I've been trying to explain that to her, but it's no good.

James. 'Ee'll be wanting to be a man next.

Marg. No, I won't! I wouldn't, if I could.

James. Oh!

Marg. No, but I want to help 'ee all the same. Look here now, there be Tom. Look at him! All of a tremble I'll be bound, as to whether he'll run away or not.

Thomas. I say, Maggie——

Marg. And here I am. I *want* him to go on. I'd take his place if I could, and yet 'ee say I can't join 'ee. Beant 'ee fools?

James. But 'omen doan't do such things.

Marg. It be time they did, then!

James. It be 'gainst nature.

Marg. 'Gainst nature! Well, beant it 'gainst nature to go hungry and be on short vittals? 'Ee may know something about sheep and cattle and corn and grass, but I reckons I knows far more'n 'ee about cooking and mending and brewing and cleaning and that be quite as good, beant it? And if I can't make both ends meet on the money 'ee gets, Thomas, then it's 'gainst nature for me to keep quiet. So there!

James. But I never heard such things afore.

Marg. Thee'st always been a bit deaf, James.

James. I never seed a 'oman like 'ee afore.

Marg. 'Ee beant travelled far, James.

James. (*Growling*) H'm!

Marg. Doan't 'ee let women preach in Chapel? O' course 'ee do. John Wesley hisself says they could. Well, where be the difference now?

Court. I think it's against the law.

Thomas. Yes—so I've told her. I think it be 'gainst the law, too.

Act 2. Scene 1

Marg. 'Gainst what law, Thomas ?

Thomas. Oh, one of 'em !

Marg. Which one ? (*Pause*) Who said so ?

Thomas. Oh—summon told me.

James. Well, I doan't hold wi' 'ee staying. Now that's straight. (*George re-enters*) Do 'ee, Jarge ?

Geo. Eh ?

James. I say, I doan't agree to Margaret staying and joining us. Do 'ee ?

Geo. Joining us ? H'm ! I doan't no.

James. Well, I doan't hold wi' it.

Thomas. Somehow I doan't, either.

Marg. Tom !

Thomas. Leastways I—I—p'rhaps I do, though.

James. Supposing all women be like 'ee. Therc'd be nothing but cackling and goings-on and all kinds of mischief. Supposing *my* old 'oman wanted to come—

Geo. Oh, that's settled it. No, Maggie, 'ee can't come.

Thomas. That be fair. Come one, come all, and that wouldn't do. But 'ee can help in some way, Maggie.

Marg. Yes, I can get thy supper ready. Oh, yes, I know !

Court. You're very strange, Margaret.

Marg. Beant that what they say about the Union? Well, I'll go as you doan't want me, but 'ee'll need me yet.
(*She departs, to their obvious relief.*)

James. Well, brothers, now let's settle down. (*They do—Courtney a little to the rear.*) Now the first thing is, that I have fower more names to put forward to the meeting. They be John Brine, James Hammet, Edward Logg and Richard Peary. (*Chorus of "Good," "That be fine," etc.*)

Geo. Have they promised to pay the shilling entrance fee and the penny a week?

James. Ay! And us've got three of the shillings already. And now let's consider they rules in time for the meeting to-night.

Thomas. Which ones do you mean, James?

James. I'll read 'em. (*The others settle down to listen, George with a stifled yawn or two.*)

Rule twenty.—“That if any master attempts to reduce the wages of his workmen, if they are members of this order, they shall immediately com—commu—communicate the same to the cor—cor—cor—responding secretary, in order that they may receive the support of the Grand Lodge; and in the meantime they shall use their utmost endeavours to finish the work they may have in hand; if any, and shall assist each other so that they may all leave the place together, and with as much prom—prom—promptitude as possible.”

Rule twenty-one.—“That if any member of this society solely on account of his taking an active part in the affairs of this order, shall be discharged from his employment, then the whole body of men at that place shall instantly leave the place, and no member of the society shall be allowed to take work at such place until such member be reinstated in his sit—sit—situation.”

Act 2. Scene 1

Geo. (*Somnolently*) How much more, Jim?

James. Rule twenty-two.—“If a member de—de—devulgee (*devulge*) any secret of the society members throughout the country shall *refuse—refuse* (*pronounced “ref-uce”*). This doan’t seem right, do it?

Geo. (*Examining the rules*) The country shall *refuse*—it’s refuse, not *refuce*.

James. Oh, so it be. “Shall refuse to work with him.” There!

Thomas. Well, I move us doan’t have the last rule.

Geo. (*A little savagely*) And I move us keeps it in and that us adds—“and further, we puts his name with black lines round on the old oak tree by the green.”

Thomas. I doan’t agree to that. It be far too wild.

James. I doan’t think it be needful, Jarge. Mind rule twenty-three: “That the object of this society can never be promoted by any acts of violence but, on the contrary, all such pro—proceedings must tend to injure the cause and destroy the society itself. This order, therefore, will not countenance any violation of the laws.”

Thomas. And how about the oath. Need us have one, do ’ee think?

Geo. What! If us didn’t have that, us’d have all sorts coming in, who’d fly like rabbits as soon as us wanted to use our strength (*looking hard at Thomas*). I reckons I knows *one* what might do that.

James. Well, what be thy advice, Harry Courtney? Do the Lunnon Unions say us must have it?

Court. (*In reverie*) Eh! Oh yes! Er—jolly fine thing. We—I—(*pulling himself together*) er—er—yes. Jolly fine thing.

Thomas. A what thing?

Geo. You be talking a foreign lingo again, like 'ee did when 'ee first came here. My word, 'ee did puzzle us for days. Thought 'ee were in a fever, I did. Hope it beant coming on again.

Court. (*Bemused*) No—no—oh, no!—Of course not. But—proceed.

James. Well, us'll keep the oath in, anyway, and I propose the Rules stand.

Geo. Agreed.

Thomas. I doan't—

Geo.—Agreed, I said.

James. And now I want to say that 'ee, Tom, be the inside guardian for the meetings and that 'ee bring the new members to the table when they takes the oath.

Thomas. I'd like summon else to do that.

Geo. Let's see, what officers have us now?

James. (*Reads*) President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer. Warden, Conductor. Three outside guardians and one inside guardian.

Act 2. Scene 1

Geo. I agree to Thomas taking the position of Conductor. That do mean he've got to put on the white hood and the kerchief over their eyes when they're led in and give 'em the password, doan't it?

Thomas. Well, I wants to say that us could very well do wi'out——

Geo. On a point of order!

James. What be thy point of order, Jarge?

Geo. Well, I says this rule—— (*Courtney quietly retires.*)

Thomas. On a point of order——

Geo. You let me have my say first, I says——

Geo.	} (<i>Simultaneously</i>)	{	What I wants to say is——
Thomas			On a point of order——
James			Now come, let's have one at a time——

Geo. (*Angrily*) Oh, dang thee point of order. Why doan't 'ee order thy coffin, Tom?

James.—Now then, Jarge. Mind this (*reads another rule*),
 “No members shall be allowed to eat, read, sleep, swear, bet wagers, or use any absurd language during lodge hours or to speak roughly to another member or he shall be fined a ha'penny.

Geo. (*With gusto, producing two pennies*) Here be tuppence, James—now let me say what I think o' un.

James. Côme, come, We durs'n't quarrel. Now a word about the banner. Who'll offer up a prayer when us dedicates it?

Geo. That'll be your line, Thomas. You've the guts for that—and that's about all.

Thomas. That beant fair, Jarge, and 'ee knows it. But I'll do it.

James. Now about those warnings that threaten us with prison if us doan't leave the Union. There be several of 'em about. I've got one here that Jarge gave me. *(He exhibits it while they cluster round reading.)*

Geo. Let's go round with a paint-pot and a-christen 'em.

Thomas. No, it'd make matters worse.

Geo. Well, let's scratch 'em off. It be only bluff on their part. They've got no power to summons us.

James. You be right, Jarge. We beant agen the law.

Geo. Well, I be for a-tearing 'em down. I tell 'ee I be tired of these quiet careful ways of ours. Let's show 'en we beant afeared of 'em. Dost agree, Harry Courtney *(turning to his chair)*? Hullo! I didn't see un go out!

James. Nor I, Jarge. Well, let's leave the bills alone, otherwise they would say we was damaging property.

Geo. Well, beant they damaging us? What be a few scratched bills to the scratching we suffer? I know where seven o' they bills be and I'll tear 'em down myself. Human life first. They beant squeamish about us and I beant going to be squeamish about them.

Thomas. Best be careful, though. Two wrongs doan't make a right.

Act 2. Scene 1

James. Aye! We musn't be spiteful. What do the old book say, "Vengeance is Mine. I will repay, saith the Lard." (*The door is suddenly opened and Margaret rushes in.*)

Marg. Tom! George! James! They be come to arrest 'ee all!

Thomas. Lard ha' mercy! There! I thought so—'ee were wrong, Maggie!

Geo. Arrest us—have they? Let 'em try! (*Raises a form in defiance.*)

Thomas. I be going. Quick, George, James!

James. Nay, stop. We have done no wrong and if we run it will seem that we have. No. I be staying. We have done no wrong and God will defend the right.

Geo. Have they taken anyone yet?

Marg. Yes, they've taken Tom's brother.

Thomas. Eh, what be that? (*Half dives under the table, but is pulled back by Margaret. Then suddenly*) I knows of a good hiding-place in the pigsties.

Marg. Doan' 'ee be a coward, Tom!

Thomas. I beant a coward—but I doan't want to go to gaol.

Geo. Well, I'll face it out, too. We have done no wrong.

James. Good! And you, Tom?

Thomas. I—I—oh, I—doan' 'no !

Marg. Tom will face it out, too, won't 'ee, Tom ?

Thomas. N—N—er—Yes—yes. Oh—I doan' 'no. 'Ee sees——

Marg. (*Crying*) Tom be—be brave and face it out, won't 'ee ?

Thomas. Oh ! Yes, dear, yes, dear !—Of course—o' course—I'll face it out ! I'll go to the Old Bailey—I'll be hanged, drawn and quartered. Anything ! Anything !—but doan' 'ee cry !

Marg. I'll be proud of 'ee Tom.

Geo. Where be Courtney ? (*They look round in silence*) He've gone ! (*With a sudden blaze*) James ! Tom ! It be all plain to me now. He be an informer. He've given us away. He be a spy. The rogue ! The damnable rogue ! Dang him !

James. Surely—surely not !

Thomas. I must own I felt 'e weren't all right.

Marg. No, 'ee didn't, Tom. It were I.

Thomas. Well, that be it—us did.
(*There is a knocking at the door and a voice.*)

Voice. Open in the name of the King ! Open !

Act 2. Scene 1

Marg. 'Ee'll not flinch, Tom?

Thomas. No, Maggie. I won't! (*Kisses her.*)
(*There is a more imperative knocking.*)

Voice. Open in the name of the King!
(*They turn resolutely to the door, James and George gripping hands.*)

(CURTAIN.)

ACT 2. SCENE 2.

A CORRIDOR AT THE DORCHESTER ASSIZES,
20TH MARCH, 1834.

(*The stage is bare save for a rear curtain and a form. A gaoler, leaning on his staff, is talking to Margaret and Jennie.*)

Gaoler. I can't help it! I've got my orders and that's enough.

Marg. But I tell 'ee, he be my husband, and I *must* see him.

Gaoler. Your husband, is he? Well, you had better look out or they may nab you as well. How'd *you* like to be in the dock?

Marg. I should neither be 'shamed nor afeared o' that.
'E've done no wrong.

Gaoler. (*Guffawing*) That's what they all say. Innocent as lambs, every one of 'em.

Marg. But I tell 'ee, he've done no wrong. Be there anything wrong in joining together with others to fight injustice and to help one another in the hour of need?

Gaoler. That's what we do here, young Mistress, so he's in good company.

Marg. You joke, Master Gaoler, but have you no pity? Tell me, for the love of God, how—where—when we can see 'em? Surely you are not so unmerciful as to bar out a wife and—and——

Gaoler. So that's it, is it? Ha—ha, so you (*turning to Jennie*)—love one of these—er—guests of ours, do you?

Jen. Yes, I do love him, but—but—(*weeping*)—I am unworthy of him!

Gaoler. There, my girl, don't you believe it! There's plenty of good young fellows waiting for the likes of you, I'm sure. Now you take my advice and go off back home and forget about this 'un and find a loyal, God-fearing man what'll——

Jen. (*Hotly*) How dare 'ee say such things? 'Ee—'ee ought to be 'shamed o' thysel'.

Gaoler. Hoity-toity! Hoity-toity! Here's a nice to-do! A reckless wench rating one of the King's servants! A saucy, brazen huzzy, aren't you?

Marg. Doan't be hard on us. She've been deeply grieved and is beside herself.

Gaoler. O—o—Oh!—Ho! Well, you'd better be a sister to her.

Act 2. Scene 2

Jen. Fool—fool—foolish man! 'Ee be wrong, 'ee doan't understand. I loved George Lovelace, I tell 'ee, but I left him because—because he would go on with the Union. But oh, I was wrong and selfish.

Gaoler. H'm! Well, that's your business. Anyhow, I say this ain't the place for you. Better go out now to a coffee-house and then go home. If you want to stay here till the end, well, I'll let you, but I should say go home right away.

Marg. No, we'll not go home till it be finished. Master Gaoler, have 'ee never loved?

Gaoler. Eh? Loved? O—ho—ho—ho—ho—ay—like the rest of us. But what's that to do with it?

Marg. Only that 'ee should know what it means to us who have loved ones here. Tell us honestly, dost think they will be set free? They've done no wrong, I tell 'ee.

Gaoler. Well, have it your own way. Anyhow, they've been arrested, haven't they? Rioting, rick-burning, sedition, I think it is.

Jen. No, Jarge never held wi' that.

Gaoler. Ah, but he might have done it, all the same.

Marg. No—no. They wouldn't think of such a thing. They be only charged wi' taking a wrongful oath, but they knew not it was wrong, I swear——

Gaoler. You'd better not. That may be a wrongful oath, too. Well, it's getting near the end. Baron Williams is the Judge, and he polishes 'em off quick, he do.

Jen. Tell, tell us, good man, where us could just catch a glimpse of our men? They'll be brave, I know, but if only we could see them just once. Look—look—*(furtively holds up a guinea)*—for a look!

Gaoler. H'm!—well—well—h'm *(taking the money)*—a guinea. Let's see, what are they charged with—thieving?

Jen. No—no—the guinea is ours. It be our savings, but there shall be two—if only 'ee will help us.

Gaoler. H'm! Two!

Jen. One look, two guineas!

Gaoler. Two looks—thine and hers. H'm!

Jen. Give us back the guinea!

Gaoler. Oh—er—yes—but——

Marg. Oh, please, please be kind.

Gaoler. Well, look here! The Court's in there *(points)* and——

Jen. *(Darting to the door)* Oh, why didn't 'ee say?

Gaoler. Hi!—Hi!—Keep back! *(Pulls Jennie back.)*

Marg. But let us see, or give us back the guinea.

Gaoler. I'll keep the guinea if you can put another to it and then—it's very risky—but if you promise to keep quiet as mice, I'll open the door for a moment and you'll see 'em.

Marg. Oh, thank 'ee, zur, thank 'ee, with all my heart.

Act 2. Scene 2

Gaoler. Well, mind you keep quiet, or there'll be the devil to pay as well. Come here, then! Quiet! *(He slowly opens door. A voice is heard and other slight sounds now and then—a cough—a rustle of paper, etc.)*

Voice. “. . . . The ostensible object of this association was to keep a check on their employers. Every person, in being a member, bound himself by an oath not to disclose anything which might take place among them. That this association was most dangerous no one could doubt: it could not be proper that the working orders should meet together and bind themselves not to disclose their proceedings; it might be used for the most dangerous purposes as regards the welfare of the State I think, M'Lud, I have proved my case. These men have defied one of the most vital laws whereby the realm of His Majesty King William IV. is preserved! These ruffians, these scoundrels”

Jen. Oh!——!

Gaoler. *(Shutting the door)*—You fool!

Jen. I am sorry. Please—please—only once more.

Gaoler. If you so much as breathe again, I'll——*(Opens door)*.

Voice. “. . . and the fact that they chose secrecy proves their evil intentions. Who but such as these would choose the furtive hour and the cryptic sign? M'Lud, knowing you as a zealous upholder of the Crown, I am sure I do not appeal in vain for their conviction. Of course they have whined of hard times, M'Lud! Hard times! Such is the covering for a thousand crimes—for breaking machines, for stealing sheep, for robbing the mail. Dick Sheppard himself

could have cracked the heads of honest bankers with the same plea—(*Laughter, and a voice "Silence in Court"*)—We are all facing hard times. The glory of Trafalgar must receive its price and the discomforts of to-day are a privilege to be borne with fortitude. I have had hard times——

Judge's Voice. Fees not so fat as formerly, eh? (*A slight guffaw.*)

Voice. (*Somewhat indignantly*) M'Lud! I trust you do not insinuate that opulence is a characteristic of the legal profession, nor even that our motives are mercenary.

Judge. No—no—no. Pray proceed.

Voice. I thank you, M'Lud. We lawyers face the stress of these days with equanimity, sagacity and patience and, dare I to say it, present the lower orders with a telling example of Christian resignation. (*Laughter.*) But knavery heeds nothing either of noble sentiment or the radiance of benevolence. Indeed it often intensifies crime by a presumptuous display of need. These in the dock are they who have so added to their malefactions and therefore I invite not only the inevitable "Guilty" but a penalty in keeping with the extreme gravity of the offence—— (*Gaoler closes the door.*)

Jen. Oh, the cruel man! He lies! He lies! Let me tell un so.

Gaoler. Stay, foolish girl. You can do nothing, and if Justice Williams knew what I'd done——

Jen. For two guineas!

Gaoler. For human pity's sake.

Act 2. Scene 2

Jen. And two guineas.

Gaoler. (*Impulsively*) I don't want your two guineas. Here, take 'em! (*Hands the money back.*)

Marg. Oh, zur.

Jen. I be sorry, 'ee deserve five—fifty guineas for thy kindness——

Gaoler. It's been a big risk.

Marg. Then take the guineas. It be small recompense. Take 'em and our gratitude.

Gaoler. Oh well, I—I'll—I'll take one. (*Takes it.*)

Marg. Both.

Gaoler. No, one. Come then—one more look—and the last. (*Opens door.*)

Jen. Look, there be Jarge and see——

Marg. It be James, he be speaking.

Gaoler. Sh!

James' Voice. "We've injured no man's reputation, character, person or property. We were uniting together to preserve ourselves, our wives and our chillen, from utter degradation and starvation."

Jen. Jarge! Jarge! I do love 'ee!

Gaoler. Here, quiet can't you? (*Closes door.*)

Jes. (*Sobbing*) I—I—c—c—can't help it.

Marg. (*Weeping a little, too*) There, there, Jennie! I saw 'em.

Jen. Didn't they look wonderful? White and drawn, but firm and brave.

Marg. We had best return.

Gaoler. But it will not take long now.

Marg. And then——?

Gaoler. It depends.

Jen. If, if they be set free?

Marg. Oh, they will be freed—they have done no wrong.

Gaoler. If guilty, I should say two years in prison and if not guilty——

Jen. Yes?

Gaoler. They might still have two years—or they might meet you two minutes later.

Jen. Oh Jarge! Jarge! Forgive me!

Gaoler. H'st! Wait, I think it is the end. (*Goes to door.*)

Jen. Beant 'ee grieved 'ee pressed Tom to go?

Marg. Grieved? Why?

Jen. He might have stayed but for 'ee. He wanted to back out, as 'ee knows. He went on 'cause 'ee bade him.

Marg. I know.

Act 2. Scene 2

Jen. Then beant 'ee sorry? He could have been wi' 'ee still.

Marg. Sorry? No. I love him and because I love him, I could not bear to see him leave his friends in the lurch.

Jen. And I pleaded wi' Jarge not to go and thought him heartless because he did—but oh!—now I see—he was a brave, true man. (*Weeps.*)

Marg. Doan' 'ee cry now, Jennie love. When he sees 'ee soon, 'ee can explain all and thy love will be richer. 'Ee were but a woman longing for a mate and 'ee were afeared o' un being taken from 'ee. Ah well! Our lives be full o' trouble at times and our cup seems full. But 'twill not always be.

Gaoler. (*Returning*) The Court has finished. Stay here awhile, some of the prisoners may come this way.

Marg. Oh—But what be the verdict?

Gaoler. Er—Guilty!

Jen. I feared as much. Oh, my poor dear Jarge!

Marg. It be unjust. They did no wrong. They did no wrong. Tom—my dear——!

(*A figure comes from the court. He stops. It is Harry Courtney.*)

Marg. It be Courtney!

Jen. Yes, it be! Oh, cruel traitor! 'Ee have betrayed our men. Wicked informer! I could kill 'ee!

Court. Well—I—I—I——

Gaoler. Now then, what's all this ?

Jen. He be a spy—the wicked lying man, who brought this trouble upon us.

Court. Jennie—Jennie—believe me—I—oh ! (*He rubs his head in dazed bewilderment*) Deuced awkward ! Rotten business !

Jen. You devil !

Court. Let me explain—I——

Marg. Thou'st brought suffering to the innocent.

Court. I know—but——

Jen. Then why did 'ee do it ?

Court. (*Still with elusive bewilderment*) Let's see. Can't understand it. Hanged if I know !

Jen. Then 'ee *will* be hanged, 'ee wretched man. Oh, Jarge !

Court. Well, I'm dashed ! I thought you'd chucked him, Jennie !

Jen. What do 'ee mean ?

Court. Hopped it, Broken it off ! Left him !

Jen. I did ! But—but——

Court. Oh, I see ! Second thoughts. Ah well, that's sporty of you. I'm very sorry.

Jen. Hypocrite !

Act 2. Scene 2

Court. H'm! That's tough, that is. Honestly I'm sorry.
Very. I can't understand it all or how I came here.
I was dragged into it, but I don't know how. I did
my very best for them.

Gaoler. That's true. He could have made his evidence
much worse. As it was, the Court was sorely vexed
with him for his poor evidence.

Marg. Be that true?

Court. As I stand here. If I could do anything to help
them, I would—anything.

Marg. Do 'ee mean that?

Court. Of course I do.

Jen. Do 'ee true? Then help us to see the Judge hisself.

Gaoler. That wouldn't do much good. Make things much
worse, in fact.

Jen. Well, tell me. How can he help? (*Points to Courtney.*)

Marg. What be there to do now?

Gaoler. The only possible thing now is a petition to the
Government. (*He goes to the door.*)

Marg. Will 'ee help us in that?

Court. (*Dazed*) I will. Queer! I can't understand it all.

Gaoler. Stand back! (*He motions them back with his staff
as James appears, manacled.*) Make way for the prisoner!

Marg. Jim! Where be Tom?

Jen. And where be Jarge? Oh, where be Jarge?

James. I think he'll come out in a minute.

Gaoler. March on there—quick!

Marg. Doan' 'ee be afeared. The Lard be wi' 'ee!

Gaoler (*Angrily*) Make way there! On, d'you here?

James. (*Moving a few paces*) We beant afeared—
God is our guide! no swords we draw
We kindle not war's battlefires
By reason, union, justice, law
We claim the birthright of our sires.
We raise the watchword liberty
We will, we will, we will be free.

Jen. (*Hysterically*) Where—where be Jarge?

Gaoler. George Loveless, Thomas Stanfield and the others
they've taken off to the hulks right away. (*Jennie
collapses into weeping.*) Now then, move out of the
way. Move on there!

Marg. (*Running after them just as they are leaving the stage*)
What—what be the sentence?

Gaoler. Seven years' transportation to Botany Bay.
(*Margaret stares long and hard as they disappear.*)

(CURTAIN.)

Act 3. Scene 1

ACT 3. SCENE I.

THE ROOM OF AN UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE.

APRIL, 1834.

(A long window is at the rear, shaded with curtains. Two prints hang on the wall. A desk is in the corner and a fairly large table in the centre. The latter is covered with papers, etc. Courtney is talking to Jennie, who is now a maid in the establishment.)

Court. He will be here shortly. I have arranged for Margaret to come in half-an-hour's time. The man at the door will let her in, and she can stay in the side room until I give the sign. You understand?

Jen. Yes. And do 'ee think he will see her?

Court. We'll make him. He can't avoid it.

Jen. And I——?

Court. You may get your chance as well.

Jen. Oh, I wonder if we shall succeed. You've been very good to use your position to arrange this.

Court. To sacrifice it, you mean. However, what with the Demonstration and the petition and perhaps this, I feel we shall accomplish something, but h'st! He is coming. *(Exit Jennie.)*

Under-Secretary. (*Entering*) Well, Courtney, these agitators seem to have played their hand well this morning. They've actually hired Copenhagen Fields for their cursed meetings and it's hard to touch them there. It's Robert Owen who managed that trick, I'll warrant, but the slightest opening for us—the slightest, and we'll clap a few dozen of them into gaol—if we can't crack their heads first. That'll cool their revolutionary ardour, eh?

Court. Possibly it will, sir, but they are very determined and highly indignant.

Und.-Sec. Be hanged to them. So are we, and we are on top.

Court. Their procession has started and they have the Reverend Doctor Wade riding on a horse at their head.

Und.-Sec. May he break his neck!

Court. I hear that Mr. T. Wakeley, M.P. for Finsbury, has also signified his sympathy, and as you know, Joseph Hume is known to favour them.

Und.-Sec. The scoundrels! Foreign money at work, I expect.

Court. They have collected £700 to date.

Und.-Sec. Ah, that proves it. Where could these scum get £700 save from abroad? I'll make a note of that for the Chief and trace it down. Well, is there anything special for me?

Court. You remember, sir, that fellow Cobbett presented a petition on behalf of the men? Well, a second petition is now here with 250,000 names.

Act 3. Scene 1

Und.-Sec. Burn it !

Court. And a deputation is likely to call this morning.

Und.-Sec. Shoot 'em ! Look here, Courtney, get me some wine, that's more important than the ramblings of the rabble. By the way, has Lord Pytchley been here yet ?

Court. No, sir !

Und.-Sec. Ha—ha ! He has a stiffish hurdle to get over. Drank five bottle of the best last night and really he can never stand more than four. But let me start on to-day's allowance, Courtney—with your assistance.

Court. (*After ordering the wine*) You had a merry night then, sir ?

Und.-Sec. (*Seating himself*) I did. Celebrating Madam Amelia's birthday ; it cost me a pretty penny, I can tell you !

Court. It must have done so. As much as a farm-labourer gets in a whole year, possibly.

Und.-Sec. Yes—er—er—damn it ! What do you mean ?

Court. I was calculating, sir— a mere whim of mine. I have a strange head for figures, sir.

Und.-Sec. Then get rid of your whim. It annoys me greatly ! (*Jennie enters with tray and departs.*) Ah ! Please fill my glass. Enough ! Thank you ! (*Takes glass*) I like that new maid you have got, Courtney. The other one was far too clumsy. Courtney, your health and congratulations on the success of your recent escapade. (*Drinks*) Ah ! Courtney, a glass for you. (*Pours and hands it to him*) Here, drink and damnation to all sedition-mongers !

Court. (*After a sip*) Thank you !

Und.-Sec. Come, you are slow to-day, Courtney ! I'll have another. (*Refills his glass*) Health to His Majesty and honour to his servants. (*Drinks*) Ah, Courtney, you look somewhat feeble to-day. Now—letters ? (*A distant noise is heard*) What is that ?

Court. That is the procession, sir. It's been going past the end of the square for the past hour or more.

Und.-Sec. Why aren't the troops out ? That would have warned them off.

Court. Shall I read the petition to you, sir. It has been presented by the London Dorchester Committee.

Und.-Sec. Read what ?

Court. This petition.

Und.-Sec. God ! No ! Burn it ! Stay ! (*Glances at it*) There now, I have faithfully considered the pernicious document and consider it to be fraudulent.

Court. It seems unfortunate that these men should be punished so severely.

Und.-Sec. Unfortunate ! Is it unfortunate that cockroaches are swept into dustpans ? Don't be a fool, Courtney. It's a warning to the working-class they won't quickly forget.

Court. No, sir, they *don't* seem to forget, do they ? (*Another roar in the distance.*)

Und.-Sec. What do you mean ?

Act 3. Scene 1

Court. Listen, sir. There they are, remembering.

Und.-Sec. Pshaw! You're essaying a pretty wit to-day, Courtney.

Court. I can't help feeling that there may be some excuse for that protest.

Und.-Sec. Look here, Courtney, what is the matter with you? You are exceedingly sentimental this morning. Has some pretty girl been playing on your heart? Come, come! Courtney, you did well in this business. You got right into their nest and the Chief and I are grateful to you. Your name may even be mentioned in the Cabinet; certainly to Lord Melbourne. You shall get your reward, but don't spoil yourself by getting squeamish. I tell you the Government is determined to stand no more nonsense from the lower orders and they won't hesitate to be firm. It may come to grapeshot yet. (*A knock is heard*) See who that is.

Court. There is a lady to see you.

Und.-Sec. Eh—Oh! Splendid! Delighted! Lady Beaumont, I presume. I am expecting her ladyship. (*Brightens up*) Shew her in.

Court. Yes, sir. (*The door opens and Margaret Stanfield enters.*)

Und.-Sec. What the dev—who are you?

Marg. Zur, I be Margaret Stanfield, wife of one who've been banished to Van Dieman's Land for no real crime.

Und.-Sec. The devil you are! Well, go after him quickly. Who let you in here? Courtney, show the lady the door—with my compliments.

Und.-Sec. Well, and what do you require ?

Jen. Zur, I plead for the men of Dorset who——

Und.-Sec. My God ! My God ! The men of Dorset are everywhere. Confound the rogues and you as well. Is this a plot ?

Jen. Oh, zur, a cat may look at a king !

Und.-Sec. Kindly hold your tongue and go.

Jen. Nay, zur. You are a gen'leman and will listen to a maid.

Und.-Sec. Infernal impudence !

Jen. No, zur, but a matter of life and death. Be merciful and listen to our petition. There be thousands marching this very day protesting against the savage treatment our men have received. My Jarge be one of the victims and I want him——

Und.-Sec. Then take him and clear—quick !

Jen. But he will be in Australia !

Und.-Sec. Then take Australia, too !

Jen. Oh, zur, you be unkind ! *(Cries near to desk.)*

Und.-Sec. Pardon me, but kindly weep two paces to the right. Lachrymal moisture has a most unfortunate effect on documents of State.

Jen. Your heart be of stone.

Act 3. Scene 1

Und.-Sec. Oh, fie! fie! That, at least, is anatomically inaccurate. Courtney, conduct the girl to the door—and Hades.

Jen. Zur, listen! (*The door opens and Margaret returns.*)

Und.-Sec. (*Suddenly savage*) Curse you—what—how dare you? Courtney! Remove the creatures (*angrily*) at once. Do you hear?

Marg. (*Advancing*) Listen to us!
(*Under-Secretary retreats rapidly.*)

Und.-Sec. (*With fierce indignation*) How dare you? Courtney!
Courtney, you fool! Out with them!

Jen. We be sorry to upset 'ee, zur, but 'ee will forgive us when 'ee understand——

Und.-Sec. Understand! I'll have you understand your manners. Courtney, you numskull, clear them out! Throw them out! D'you hear?
(*Courtney is silent.*)

Jen. (*Handing him a document*) Take this petition and promise but to read it carefully and we will go. (*Jennie and Margaret advance and the Under-Secretary retreats again.*)

Und.-Sec. (*Savagely grabbing petition*) Oh, all right! And now be off!

Jen. (*Following him round*) Do 'ee promise?

Und.-Sec. (*Somewhat frantically*) Yes, yes! Now go—and you (*savagely to Jennie*) get out of my service at once.

I—(*Pausing and suddenly cooling down*) Ah—ha! I think I see it now! Courtney—you devil! You have arranged this pretty plot. I congratulate you on its success. Your own and these—er—damsels' audacity—not to mention your knavery—has my admiration. Egad! I have still a little to learn from menials, lackeys and subordinates. Nevertheless, permit me to warn you, my dear Courtney, that you may shortly share the delights of these convict friends of yours. And now perhaps your *lady* friends will retire. (*Jen. and Marg. depart.*)

Court. Sir, these men of a lowly class are languishing in custody through class hatred. Allow me to urge on you the point of view of the oppressed. In some strange way I have been involved in this persecution, yet I know they have wronged nobody. How I came to be in it I hardly know—(*passes his hand over his brow bewilderingly*)—Deuce take it!—I—I—can't make it out. (*A pause, and then a somewhat strained outburst*) Look here, old chap, it isn't cricket, you know. The poor bounders haven't had a chance, you know. Be sporty and help them a bit—

Und.-Sec. Ah, Courtney, I see you evidently needed stimulation for your roguery. In short, you are drunk!

Court. Eh? Perhaps so. I don't know. Can't make it out. (*Again with a sudden outburst*) Still, these Johnnies have been badly hit and I'm with them—every time. (*Sinks into a chair*) You think you can crush 'em, but you can't—no—you can't!

Und.-Sec. (*Judicially*) Courtney—really—this premature intoxication certainly proves disastrous both to your speech and your dignity.

Act 3. Scene 1

Court. I don't care—not a hang! You think you can crush 'em, but you can't, I say. These beggars you've downed will be on top yet. What's that scripture bit—"The meek shall inherit the earth." That's it—and it's true!

Und.-Sec. (*With contempt*) Poor—fool!

(CURTAIN.)

ACT 3. SCENE 2.

THE INN (INTERIOR) APRIL, 1838.

(The scene is almost identical with Act 2, Scene 1, excepting some slight re-arrangement of furniture. The curtain rises to Jennie, dressed for departure, talking to Margaret who has taken her place at the Inn.)

Jen. Don't forget the chickens, will 'ee? And then there be Toby. We give him a good bone every day. Oh, and remember there be always pink valances in the big bedroom and—yes—don' 'ee forget all the large chests stand on the landing. I think that be all.

Marg. Where do 'ee say the other tinder is kept?

Jen. By the kitchen cupboard—always. Be there anything else?

Marg. I think not, Jennie.

Jen. }
Marg. } (*Simultaneously*) Well!

Jen. It be goodbye at last, Margaret !

Marg. Yes, dear, but 'ee'll come back some day.

Jen. No, I doan't think so. I doan't want to. I could never bear to see this place again wi'out Jarge.

Marg. But he'll come back, Jennie. They'll all be back some day.

Jen. No, they won't. Three years they've been gone, come Michaelmas. Three years. It seems ages.

Marg. Yes, it do, and yet—and yet—it will seem but as yesterday when they return.

Jen. Oh, but supposing the Government do not let them ? You know what the Ensign said who passed this way last month. They be cruel enough for anything.

Marg. Their sentence was seven years and they dare not keep them longer.

Jen. But why have they kept them so long, in spite of everything that have been done and said ? Think of the meetings that have been held and the petition signed, and it's been no good.

Marg. Us doan'no. More may be happening than 'ee knows.

Jen. I be afraid not, Margaret. You mind how we saw that gen'leman at Whitehall—and nothing came of it. Oh, they be brutal men. Brutes ! The Under-Secretary promised us he would do something, and he did nothing !

Marg. It seems like it, I know, but maybe it be different.

Act 3. Scene 2

Jen. Not wi' him. He've drowned the very thoughts of it in many a punch-bowl.

Marg. Well, we will live in faith and hope. Think what Tom said in the message he sent me before last Christmas. He had kept a stout heart, said he, and God would give him the victory yet—and if he can be like that, can't we?

Jen. But I—I—I have not heard from Jarge at all.

Marg. Well, I've heard but twice from Thomas and one of those had a message from Jarge.

Jen. Only to hope that my chilblains were better and whether I'd tried putting cold 'taters on 'em.

Marg. Oh no, there was more than that, I be sure, and besides you know he beant a scholar like Tom.

Jen. He be *quite* as good as Tom.

Marg. Yes, yes. I doan't mean to say he beant, though 'ee knows he can't write like he can.

Jen. And supposing he can't? He's better than James and Tom put together in hedging and ditching and 'ee knows he can sing better than any o' 'em.

Marg. Yes dear, but there, we won't quarrel now you be going.

Jen. No, of course not. Margaret, you have been good to me!

Marg. We've helped one another.

Jen. Goodbye!

Marg. God be wi' 'ee—Listen! (*The sound of wheels*)
There be the carrier.

Jen. The carrier! And Jarge was to have driven that
and we was to settle down and—but all that be gone
now.

Marg. Never mind, Jennie, he'll be a driver yet. Perhaps
he be practising in Australia.

Jen. What be the good of him practising in Australia?
I wanted him to practise here. Well—goodbye!

Marg. Once more, God blee 'ee! (*A knock is heard*) What
be that? (*She goes to the door and lets in Harry Courtney.*)

Court. Why Jennie—and Margaret!

Jen. The Lord preserve us—it's Harry Courtney!

Marg. So 'tis. Who'd a-thought it? What be 'ee doing
here?

Court. I have a message for you.

Marg. }
Jen. } (*Simultaneously*) Us?

Court. Yes. Well, really Margaret. But where are you
going, Jennie?

Jen. I be going away. I can't stay here. It haunts me, so
I am going and Margaret is taking my place. Have
'ee heard of the men? And what brings 'ee here?

Court. I am no longer a Civil Servant, as you may guess.
I am helping the London Dorchester Committee, which
has raised nearly £1,300 for the assistance of the men
themselves when they return and for their dependents
meanwhile.

Act 3. Scene 2

Marg. (*After their astonishment*) We be deeply grateful—but what news have 'ee of the men?

Court. Very little—and yet, the Government is nervous. Twelve members of Parliament are working for the case to be re-opened or for the men to be released.

Jen. But they be still out there and 'spect they always will be.

Marg. No, no. But what else have 'ee to say?

Court. I'll tell you. I have heard strange rumours that they may be released this year. There! Has that heartened you?

Marg. Released? Released? Oh, God be thanked! God be thanked!

Jen. Will that mean Jarge as well?

Court. I cannot say—but why not?

Jen. 'Ee cannot say?

Court. No, I can't exactly. Of course, they'll all be together, excepting perhaps Jarge. They looked upon him as the ringleader and possibly thought he would start a rick-burning campaign, directly he was free. But mind you, all that is only a rumour.

Jen. Oh!

Court. The Captain of a schooner that arrived with wool told me some fortnight ago and then I met a clerk of the Home Office in a Coffee Tavern. I gathered from him that something was afoot.

Jen. Oh, I doan't want to go now and yet—they be expecting me.

Court. Were you going in the carrier? It'll be waiting for you still.

Jen. Yes, I must go. But—I—I may come back.

Marg. You'll come back when they return? Everyone will be talking about it. It's bound to be in the "Times" and the "Register."

Jen. I doan't no. It depends. Oh, but they won't come, I'm sure—and even if they do——! Goodbye, I'll go!

Marg. Goodbye, and God bless 'ee. (*Exit Jennie.*)

Court. Poor girl, she has been distressed.

Marg. She have. For months after they'd gone, she would mope and cry and often upbraid herself for throwing up Jarge just afore they arrested him. Later she grew brighter, yet could never bear being reminded of the past.

Court. And you—you have been very brave, haven't you?

Marg. Nay, my heart has been more than full at times.

Court. Never mind, you'll forget all about it when they return.

Marg. I wish Jennie hadn't gone, but she had to go to a mansion west o' Darchester. She could not bear remaining here any longer.

Court. Ah, well! Good fortune to her! And now, I'll go to my room if you don't mind. There are several things I must attend to. Can I have the same room as—as three years ago—is it three or four?

Act 3. Scene 2

Marg. Over fower. Yes, take the same room and I'll get 'ee a meal.

Court. Thanks. (*He retires. Margaret busies herself about the room. Suddenly the door is flung open and Jennie reappears, breathless.*)

Jen. Margaret—they be come ! They be come !

Marg. Eh ? What—who do 'ee mean ?

Jen. The men—the men, I tell 'ee. A special carrier brought them not five minutes since. They be come, I tell 'ee.

Marg. The men here—but surely—oh, it beant true. (*The door opens again and George and Thomas appear*) Tom ! Tom ! Oh, God be praised, God be praised !

Jen. Jarge ! Oh, thank God ! It be 'ee, it be really 'ee, Jarge !
(*There is much excitement and embracing.*)

Geo. Yes, us be here again.

Marg. How—why—oh, how has it happened ?

Jen. Jarge ! Jarge ! I've been a-wanting 'ee——

Geo. We were suddenly dumped in a ship some ten—no twelve—weeks since and landed at Plymouth. We made our way through Exeter and then found a wain going to Upwey and when the driver found out who us be, he would bring us on here—and here us be !

Marg. Oh Tom ! Tom !—To think 'ee be home again.

Jen. Where be t'others, Jarge? Brine and Hammet and James?

Geo. They be here all right and have gone to their homes. We heard 'ee be here and came straight on. The whole village 'll be here in a few minutes, when they gets to know, I suppose.

Marg. Yes, yes, of course. Oh, thank God for His mercy! Have 'ee suffered much?

Jen. Ay, have it been very bad out there?

Geo. Pretty stiff at times, for us've roughed it, I can tell 'ee. The folk in Australia beant 'zactly the sweetest 'ee knows. Thieves, sheep-stealers, smugglers and footpads as well as decent folk cruelly mixed up wi' 'em. I worked on the road with a chain gang for a time and then on a Government farm. Our hut was none of the best. In fine weather us could be abed and view the stars; in foul weather feel the wind and the rain and this worsened the rheumatiz pains which the cold irons round my legs and the hard laying had brought on. Luckily I didn't have floggings such as some of 'em get out there. Ah! It h'an't 'zactly been a bed o' roses. Ah, well, we be home now, though how it were done, God only knows.

Jen. Oh, Jarge, Jarge; did 'ee suffer all this? How could men be so cruel?

Geo. I doan't know, Jennie—I can't understand how they can be—but they be.

Marg. There've been scores of meetings as well as petitions for thy sake!

Act 3. Scene 2

Jen. There was a great procession in London wi' thousands of people—and Jarge, Margaret and I managed to see one of the great men at Whitehall. Oh, he was put out——

Marg. (*Somewhat grimly*) And so were us, Jennie.

Thomas. We heard that there was great goings-on, but we got to know precious little.

Geo. What have happened to the Union?

Marg. It is gone, I be afeared.

Geo. Dead, is it? Dead! Have us suffered for nought?

Marg. Nothing that be of God can die.

Geo. Ah, you be right, Margaret. The seed be sown and some day the harvest will be gathered, though nothing of it be seen to-day.

Jen. Tell us, Jarge, what happened during those weary years?

Geo. It be too long a story, maid.

Jen. But what happened at the trial? We saw James for a moment, afterwards, but 'ee—I thought my heart would break because I didn't see 'ee. I thought perhaps 'ee knew I was there and didn't want to see me and so had been taken another way.

Geo. Knew 'ee were there? Of course us didn't. How could us? No, they divided us after the sentence and some of us were taken one way and some another, but we all met together again in the hulks, didn't us, Tom?

Thomas. Ay! Among the beetles *and* the rats *and* all the other creepy-crawling things.

Geo. (Gravely) Ay! I thought for awhile I'd sooner be hanged dead than suffer as I did. When they took us here, we walked peaceably with the constable to Darchester. There they searched us and sheared our heads and the Chaplain and a lawyer feller named Young tried to get us to confess we was working at some terrible plot—the fool! Why, even the masters had to admit that we'd been good labourers and that they couldn't find fault wi' us on that account. But it were no good. The judge was like flint and so we got sentenced and soon found ourselves in chains. They made I work for 6 weeks at Portsmouth afore we sailed with twelve score other convicts. I had a berth about six feet square—wi' six others, and us lived in it day and night. But doan't let's talk any more about it. Us beant convicts any more, but free men, thank God!

Thomas. I must walk down to Jim's. He have a bundle of mine and there be something for 'ee in it, Margaret.

Marg. Oh—Tom! (*They go out.*)

Geo. (A little awkwardly) Well—Jennie!

Jen. (With equal diffidence) Jarge—Jarge—it were here—that I——

Geo. I know—but there—doan' 'ee mind it.

Jen. Have 'ee forgiven me, Jarge? I thought perhaps 'ee never would.

Geo. Forgiven 'ee? Why, of course. I knew it were only a woman's way. 'Ee see, they argy so queer at times——

Act 3. Scene 2

Jen. (*Reprovingly*) Jarge !

Geo. Sorry ! But, Jennie, I thought 'ee—had perhaps—meant it. I was afeared lest 'ee weren't here when I came back.

Jen. I'd nearly gone, but it was *because* I loved 'ee, not because I didn't. I couldn't bear to be here, waiting and pining—in vain.

Geo. Not in vain, lovey. I be here at last, but I 'spect old Mrs. Brown has gone by now, eh ? And has her cottage gone, too ?

Jen. Yes—and the carrier's cart !

Geo. (*Laughing*) Ah, yes ! The carrier's cart. But Jennie, there'll be other ways of getting to happiness, besides carrier's carts.

Jen. They've collected £1,300 for the six of 'ee, Jarge.

Geo. (*Incredulously*) What ? £1,300 ? Then Jennie, what do 'ee say if us went to Canada with my share ?

Jen. In a carrier's cart, Jarge ?

Geo. Oh, Jennie ! (*Kisses her. The door opens and Thomas appears with James.*)

James. (*Greeting her*) Jennie, God bless 'ee. I've heard all that 'ee have done.

Jen. It be good to see 'ee again, but it be little that I did for 'ee—in fact, there've been nothing 'cept the meeting we had wi' the Under-Secretary at Westminster. 'Twas a brazen thing, I confess. Margaret, her it be who've done most. But James, beant it splendid news that the London committee have collected a great sum of money for 'ee ? £1,300. What will 'ee do wi' they share ?

James. Eh? What be this? What do 'ee mean, Jennie?

Geo. Why, James, it be true. Us've actually got about £200 apiece to start afresh. Well, I've made up my mind to go to Canada and get my living there.

James. Two—hunderd—pound! Well, it be too good to be true.

Thomas. Two—hunderd—pounds! for me, as well, Jennie?

Jen. Yes, for each of 'ee.

James. Two hunderd pound!

Geo. Two hunderd pound!

Thomas. Two hunderd pound!

James. Will James Brine and James Hammett and John Stanfield have it as well?

Jen. Yes. Well, what do 'ee think 'ee'll do, Tom?

Thomas. I'll count it first to make sure; but I be off to tell Maggie. (*Exit.*)

James. Well, my home be gone, and in any case we shouldn't have much chance to start here. I be going right away to Essex or that way if I can.

(*Courtney enters and the men turn round.*)

James. Hullo! What be this?

Geo. Why, it be that man Courtney. Harry Courtney, the informer!

Court. George——

TOLPUDDLE

Act 3. Scene 2

Geo. Scoundrel ! (*Advances towards him.*)

Court. Oh, Hullo !—Back ?—How——

Geo. (*Heatedly*). Back ?—Back ?—Us should never have gone but for 'ee. I'd like to——(*raises his fist threateningly*).

James. Steady there, Jarge !

Jen. Yes, Jarge dear, listen first and he'll explain.

Geo. Listen first ! But no amount o' listening first will undo the wrong he've done. And what do it mean, him being here, Jennie—Margaret ?

Court. I'll explain. (*Drops into an armchair*) You see, it was like this. I—I—now let's see—Oh, hang ! I'm all foggy again. (*Pauses*) Blowed if I can remember quite. Anyway——

Geo. Look here, out wi' it quick (*angrily shaking his shoulder*) or I'll send 'ee going, do 'ee hear ?
(*The light begins to fade.*)

Geo. I'll send 'ee going, I say. Trying to make up some lie to cover thyself, I suppose, but 'ee won't get round me. Say what 'ee wants and then go, quick !
(*The light fades until there is darkness.*)

Court. All right. All right. Wait a moment. I'm trying to remember, but it's difficult. I know I was mixed up in the beastly business but I got out of it as quickly as I could——

Geo. 'Ee beant going to get out of it this time. One minute more and if 'ee don't spit it out, I'll send 'ee *spinning down the road*. 'Ee beant staying here, I tell 'ee, so 'ee'd better go now.

James. Hear what he have to say first, Jarge, though I agree I doan't see how it'll make much difference.

Geo. It can't make any difference, the rogue !

Court. Yes, it will, I assure you. I didn't realise you know—and—oh, Lor' I wish I could remember——

Geo. Now I beant going to hear any more. Clear out and count thyself lucky that I beant as devilish as 'ee be, or 'ee'd have fared badly. Go—go—do 'ee hear?

Tom. (*In modern voice*) Yes, go—go—going, Harry.

Jean (*not Jennie*) Harry, do you hear—we are going.
(*The stage lightens.*)

Court. Wha's that?

Tom (*the tourist not Stanfield*) Come on, old chap. We are tired of waiting.

(*Light. The Inn is again modern and Tom and Margaret and Jean are trying to awaken Courtney. They are all in motoring costume again.*)

Marg. Well, we will go without you, Harry. You can stay here if you want to. We'll soon be *spinning down the road* to home.

Court. (*Opening his eyes*) Tha's all right. Let me explain I say—if I can. You see, Margaret—Jennie—where's Jennie? Oh, there she is. You see—I—I—what—what's the matter with you, Jennie, and your clothes?

Jean. My clothes? What do you mean?

Court. (*Looking round, bewildered*) I say, where's Jim—and George—(*The landlord enters*)—and who are you?

TOLPUDDLE

Act 3. Scene 2

Jean. Jim? George? What on earth do you mean. Here, come on, old chap. The landlord wants to lock up.

Landlord. That's all right, Ma'am. We gets 'em like this sometimes. He'll be better in the fresh air.

Court. (*Struggling to his feet*) I say—what—what (*speechlessly stares round*) Where's George?

Landlord. Do you mean old Jarge that was a-yarning to 'ee an hour or so ago? Well, he've gone home. Said it weren't much good a-talking to you, he did.

Court. Gone, gone has he? "Not much good talking to me?" (*A long perplexed pause and then a sigh as he takes in the situation*) Have I been asleep?

Jean. Just a little, Harry. Yes, you've been asleep and now open your eyes, do.

Court. (*Half to himself*) "Not much good talking to me." (*A pause*) He's wrong. Yes, Jennie. I've been asleep, but my eyes *have* been opened. (*Staring round the room*) Let's see, what's this place?

Jean. Tolpuddle, Harry. A quaint little place with a funny name. And now, are we going on?

Court. Tolpuddle. Tolpuddle. H'm! A little place, but bigger than you think, Jean—Jennie. Are we going on? Now—I—wonder!

(CURTAIN.)